

FRENCH CLAIMS.

PETITION
OF
MERCHANTS OF BOSTON,
IN RELATION TO
French Claims.

JANUARY 6, 1873.—Referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :

The memorial and petition of the subscribers, merchants of Boston, Massachusetts, respectfully sheweth that, among the multiplied injuries inflicted by the belligerents on the commerce of the United States, in the course of the long and desolating war in which several nations of Europe were engaged, between and during the years 1793 and 1801, the depredations committed by the public and private armed vessels of France were, to your memorialists, peculiarly injurious.

The claims of your memorialists on France for ample remuneration were the stronger in these cases, as the seizure and condemnation of their property had been made by the express authority of the French government, contrary to the plainest principles of the law of nations, and in direct violation of existing treaties.

Your memorialists will not enter into a detail of the various decrees and acts of the French government by which their property was captured, condemned, or confiscated; the archives of this Government will furnish the true type of them, and also of the period when they were operative; it would, moreover, be a useless trespass on the time of your honorable body, because the French government has admitted them to be violations, and can therefore only serve as matters of fact, not of principles.

The United States having a great political and national object in view, to wit, to obtain the abrogation of the treaties with France, and a discharge from the liabilities under them, and particularly under the article of mutual guarantee, yielded up the claims of her citizens for these great public advantages in the convention of 1800.

Your memorialists were among the first to sanction this act of their Government, and to see in it a strong evidence of profound wisdom;

but, while your memorialists applaud the wisdom of the measure, they must dissent from the principle of sacrificing private interests for the public good, without indemnifying the sufferers; because it violates the plainest dictates of common justice, as well as the spirit and the letter of the Constitution.

The government of France, up to the date of the "renunciation of indemnities mutually due or claimed," always considered the recognition of these claims as due to her honor, and attached them as a charge upon her national character. The United States has, in like manner, and in many solemn acts, declared the claims to be fair and just; and upon this ground, as her duty dictated, volunteered her agency for the recovery from France. Your memorialists are thus placed in a new and unexampled situation; they had been taught to consider as reciprocal obligations the duties of allegiance and protection which, as citizens, they had a right to look for and expect when their property was violently wrested from them by authority of the French Government; they find their own Government exercising its power and authority to prevent their obtaining indemnity. Your memorialists believe that the United States did receive a full and entire satisfaction and equivalent for their claims; and they therefore pray that your honorable body will take their case into consideration, and make provision for the payment thereof, or restore to them their claims and their remedy against France.

The considerations of justice which heretofore led your respective committees to make forty-one favorable reports on these claims, and your honorable bodies to vote bills for their relief, are now invoked, and full confidence entertained that the high obligation on the United States to satisfy them may now be consummated by their faithful discharge.

And, as in duty bound, your memorialists will ever pray.

Mrs. AUGUSTA H. CHAPMAN,

Grand-daughter and heiress of Peter Clark; and heiress to Reuben Shapley, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, both deceased.